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AN ACCOUNT OF THE LIBRARY OF THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON.[1]

By George Bethell, F.R.Hist.S., Registrar and Librarian.

Illustrated by Early Printed Medical Books, Manuscripts, etc.

ON 23 June, 1773, Dr. John Coakley Lettsom issued a pamphlet entitled "Hints for the Establishment of a Medical Society of London". A few abstracts from this publication, which give Dr. Lettsom's object in suggesting the formation of a Medical Society, may not be out of place. He says: "Nothing has contributed more to the advancement of Science than the establishment of Literary Societies. These excite a generous ardour in liberal minds and raise even envy itself into useful emulation. In Medical Science which rational estimation has placed first in the scale of honour, the science which proposes the noblest object for its end, the preservation and restoration of health, the improvements which have already resulted from the formation of societies are well known to the medical world. The principal part of our knowledge must be ever derived from comparing our observations with those of others. In this view the utility of societies which afford an opportunity for the mutual communication of our thoughts must be sufficiently apparent. It is remarkable that, among the different associations which have been established in the Metropolis, a society for founding a medical library for the use of its respective members, has been so little attended to. An institution of this kind is so apparently useful and interesting to those who are desirous of obtaining an easy access to the best ancient

[1] Read at a meeting of the Library Association, 8 January, 1914, in the rooms of the Medical Society of London.

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and modern authors that it requires no apology for the promotion of a medical library."

Almost immediately after the issue of this pamphlet Lettsom, along with other medical men resident in London, succeeded in instituting the Medical Society of London which is now in its 142nd year. In the first instance, the society was restricted to thirty physicians, thirty surgeons, and thirty apothecaries, these last representing the general practitioner of the time, and a certain number of corresponding members.

A few words respecting Dr. John Coakley Lettsom may be of interest, for he not only obtained fame by founding the Medical Society of London, but he was a man of varied tastes and attainments and was looked upon by Londoners of that period as a public benefactor; he was ever on the alert to improve sanitation, the conditions under which the poor lived, and the formation of general dispensaries and hospitals. He was a great lover of books, and the Medical Society of London has greatly benefitted by his beneficent donations of valuable books and manuscripts.

The meetings of the Society were first held at Dr. Lettsom's house. The Society's first home was in Crane Court, Fleet Street, and they remained there until 1788 when Dr. Lettsom presented the Society with the freehold of a house in Bolt Court, Fleet Street (the fine picture by Medley hanging in the meeting room depicts the founders of the society and Lettsom in the act of presenting the deeds to his colleagues), where they remained until 1850. The migration of the medical profession West making it desirable that the Society should be in a convenient place for its fellows, a house was taken in George Street, Hanover Square. They remained there until 1871, when they removed to the present more commodious premises.

This excellent man may truly be said to have carried his heart in his mouth; he was an ornament to society, the liberal friend to merit, and an example of beneficence to every avenue of human distress. His benevolence was unbounded. The well-known epigrams relating to Lettsom are perhaps worth recalling:—

When any sick to me apply,
I physicks, bleeds and sweats 'em,
If after that they choose to die
What's that to me? I Lettsom.

Another version :—

When any patients call in haste,
I physics, bleeds and sweats 'em,
If after that they choose to die,
Why, what cares I? I Lets'em.

and

If any folk applies to I,
I Blisters, bleeds and sweats 'em,
If after that they please to die,
Well then, I lets 'em.

and

I, John Lettsom,
Blisters, bleeds and sweats 'em,
If after that they please to die,
I John, lets 'em.

In the foundation of the Society, Lettsom was greatly assisted by Dr. John Fothergill, in whose memory Lettsom instituted a medal. The present Fothergillian Gold Medal, awarded every three years, is one endowed by Dr. Anthony Fothergill.

I do not propose wearying you as librarians with the history of the Society, although a few points may be noteworthy as showing that a Society such as this in the foundation was no easy matter. Human nature in the way of petty jealousies led to much trouble at times and the Society was frequently, especially in its early history, very often on the verge of extinction, and, as I have just said, mainly through trivial incidents.

These troubles also led to financial troubles and from contemporary cash-books it is ascertained that the early income fluctuated considerably. Its first year's income was only £73. Two years later it had reached £178. In one year it fell to £30. In 1780 it rose again to £126 and then fell again to £22. In 1788, the year the Bolt Court premises were presented, the income reached £418. With slight fluctuations it fell again to £88 in 1813 and again in 1821 the income reached £703.

The donation of books was of frequent occurrence, Lettsom being most probably among the chief benefactors in this way. It is not generally known, however, that in 1800 a large number of books was purchased from Dr. James Sims for £500, the Society also engaging to pay an annuity of £30 to Dr. Sims and his wife. Probably no Medical Society ever expended so large a sum at any one time on its library. Dr. Sims seems to have possessed to a degree altogether extraordinary the power of ruling the elections of the Society; he managed to be re-elected its President for a period of twenty years. This constant re-election of one party proved, however, unfortunate for the Society. It was the cause of the secession of a number of Fellows of the Medical Society of London and the establishment of the Medico-Chirurgical Society, now the Royal Society of Medicine.

A few notes respecting the initial formation of the Library will, I am sure, be of interest, as some of them show that even librarianship in 1773 was to some extent based upon a practical foundation. The Rules *re* the library contained the following:—

1. The books shall be properly arranged and each volume distinctly numbered. An alphabetical catalogue shall be kept of all the printed books expressing the edition of each, place and where printed, date, size, and number as it stands in the library.

2. A printed paper shall be affixed to each volume, containing the name of the Society, the number of the book, and an abstract of the laws relating to receiving and returning of books, and, if it were presented to the Society, the donor's name shall be entered in it.

The following rule calls for attention. Evidently they did not consider the *subject* of the book.

3. Any member detaining a pamphlet or volume in duodecimo above one week, an octavo two weeks, a quarto three weeks, or a folio four weeks, shall be liable to a penalty of one, two, three, or four shillings for each week he shall detain it, provided that such penalty exceed not half the value affixed to the book by the Council.

This contains a hint to rate-supported libraries which are desirous of increasing their funds.

A few items *re* the early management of the library may prove attractive. In 1774 one Fellow, a Mr. Bland, incurred a fine of 12s. for having kept a book beyond the limited time. In the same year the Librarian, Dr. Hulme, was ordered to pay the full value of, or else replace, a book lost during his librarianship. Such a procedure now-a-days would tend to a scarcity of persons desirous of becoming librarians. In 1776 the Council resolved, owing to the shortage of papers and communications, that each member in rotation deliver in a paper, or forfeit 5s., or present to the Library a book equal to that amount.

The Society has from its institution been in the habit of awarding medals for research and other important medical and surgical work. In 1773 a gold medal of the value of ten guineas was instituted by the Society to be awarded every two years to the author of the best essay on a subject to be stated by the Council. In 1784 Dr. Lettsom placed at the disposal of the Society another Gold Medal also of the value of ten guineas to be annually bestowed upon a candidate, under the same regulations as the foregoing, which was to be called the Fothergillian in honour of Dr. John Fothergill. The continuance of the gift ceased in 1813, when the Society received a bequest of £500 under the will of Dr. Anthony Fothergill, the interest of which was to be laid out in gold medals and other honorary prizes for promoting medical knowledge and other useful arts.

The scheme, continued until 1891, was then revised by the Charity Commissioners and with the accumulated fund a sum of £916 10s. 5d. was invested in consols and the proceeds devoted to the presentation of a medal every three years and the balance devoted to the Library for the purchase of books. The painting of the founders of the Society hanging in this room was executed by Samuel Medley, the grandfather on his mother's side of Sir Henry Thompson. Medley had been under some obligation to the President, Dr. Sims, and in return for the services rendered to him painted a portrait of his friend. This was so good a likeness

that Sims engaged the artist to portray a meeting of the Society. Probably there is no other picture existing containing so many medical celebrities as this one. One point is worth mentioning, i.e. that Edward Jenner was painted in later. The picture was engraved by Nathaniel Branwhite in 1801.

With regard to the present constitution of the Library: it contains about 23,000 volumes and a unique collection of printed tracts on medical and allied subjects, also about 500 manuscripts, including a collection of Greek MS. Among the manuscripts is the diary of Dr. John Ward, vicar of Stratford-on-Avon. This diary, which runs into seventeen volumes extending from 1648 to 1679, contains much that is interesting both medically, ecclesiastically, politically and socially of that period. Mr. Ward had practised medicine, and his many medical references especially relating to his visits to London hospitals and the treatment of his parishioners are of great interest. Possibly the most interesting of all his entries is that relating to the death of Shakespeare. The entry is as follows: "Shakespear, Drayton and Ben Jhonson had a merry meeting and it seems drank too hard for Shakespear died of a feavour there contracted".

This important entry filled in a gap that had long been obscured, regarding the great poet. Some little time ago, in going through the manuscripts, I came across three volumes, relating to the Royal College of Physicians. These are presumably in the handwriting of the famous Dr. Mead. At this meeting of Librarians I should like to give you an extract[1] to show that even as early as January, 1708, librarians were suffering, as now, by being an underpaid class. The College decided to appoint an under library keeper, and formulated rules respecting the duties of the official, a few of which I give you:—

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[1] At the request of the meeting Mr. Bethell promised to give the rules, etc., in full.

COPY.

Committee meeting held January 25th, 1708.

The matter of settling an under-library keeper was moved, & it was proposed whether there should be such a library keeper or no? & it was carried yt there should.

Then ye following proposal of ye Committee to ye censors Board was read over and agreed to paragraph by paragraph except such as have Quære upon them.

The Committee appointed by ye College to consider of a method to render ye College Library usefull, humbly make ye following representations.

That there be an under Library Keeper chosen to attend at ye times appointed.

That he shall at least understand Latin & Greek also ye modern languages if such an one can be procured.

That he give security for his fidelity.

That he be continued only durante benae placito Praesidis & censorum & Sociorum.

? That he be rather a single person than married.

? That in case such a person be only under library keeper, he may have a *sufficient salary* for his Subsistance.

? That if hereafter it shall be thought convenient to join this place with that of the Beadle of ye College, then ye expence of ye College hereby will be lessen'd, and by having a Lodging in ye College, he will be more ready at hand on all occasions.

That ye Under Library keeper give his attendance at ye Library from Lady day to Michs. every morning on Tuesday, Thursday & Saturday from 10 to 12 a'clock & in ye afternoon of those Tuesdays & Thursdays from 4 to 6. And from Michaelmas to Lady day every morning on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 to 12 & in ye afternoon of those days from 2 to 4.

That he takes care yt ye Library be kept clean & neat by having it swept, ye windows and seats dusted down & when necessary ye floors washt & yt at least once a quarter all ye books and shelves be cleaned; & yt he be allowed by ye College for one to assist him herein ten shillings a Quarter besides his Salary.

That he shall upon ye days appointed for ye Library to be opened be ready to fetch books yt shall be called for, & as soon as it is done withall shall immediately reposit it in its proper place, & see yt all books be kept in their places.

That he make a Catalogue of ye books of ye Marquesse of Dorchester in ye order as they stand with references to ye shelves and Number. This catalogue to be divided into several distinct parts, yt when ye view of ye Books is to be made, some of ye Curators of ye Library may take one; others, other parts & so ye whole may be run over in a

shorter time. N.B. In taking this & other catalogues to put down ye volume, ye place & time where & when printed.

That he examines and collates ye Alphabetical catalogue yt is made of ye Marquesse's Books, & mark down where any are missing & to enter those not already entered if any such.

That he likewise makes a Catalogue of all ye other MSS. & Books, yt are not of ye gift of ye Marquesse of Dorchester, & where ye Benefactors names are known, to register them ; And from time to time as any books are given, immediately to enter their titles & editions with ye Donors name & afterwards to catalogue them.

That a distinct book be kept to enter any sums of money yt shall be given to ye Library for buying books ; ye names of ye Donors & ye Titles, Editions, & prices of those books bought with yt money to be entered.

A wast book to lye by in ye Library, wherein any Member may enter ye Titles of any Book yt may be thought proper to be purchased for ye Library.

That ye Library shall be free to all ye Members of ye College, but before admission into ye Library each to be obliged fidem dare to ye observance of what is injoined by ye Harveian Statute with such alterations as shall be thought proper. The form of which promise to be wrote in a Book to be subscribed by all yt shall be admitted. And they at ye same time to give ye under Library Keeper half a crown. No member to be obliged to any subscription of money towards ye Library, but what they please to do voluntarily.

That no candles be brought into ye Library or any to have liberty of smoking Tobacco there.

That a general view of all ye Books be made every half year or oftner if thought convenient by ye Curators.

That for preventing ye books being stoln, in ye Body of ye Title Page, as likewise before the first chapter or ye beginning of ye Book to be wrote *Libr. Coll. Med. Lond.*

That since there is a promise made yt none of ye Marquesses books be separated or sold, such other duplicates as are in ye library to be disposed off for purchasing such books as are wanting. However if ye names of the donors be known, they ought to be registered and preserved.

FINIS.

It was then proposed whether 20£ a year alone and no more be ye salary of ye library keeper, which was agreed to, and yt there shall be Curators of ye Library chosen.

Ordered yt Dr. Harvey's Deed be produced ye next College day : & yt ye candidates for ye library keepers place do proceed by petition to ye Board.

Incunabula and Early Printed Books.

The books before 1500 are on exhibition and although I have an annotated list I do not propose to say anything relating to them beyond the fact that they are mostly in good condition and number seventeen items.

List of Incunabula in the Library of the Medical Society of London.

PLINIUS, Secundus (Caius).

Naturalis Hystoriae, libri xxxvii. Fol. Parmae impressus opera et impensa.
Andreae Portiliae. M.cccc.lxx (ix).

ALBUCASIS.

Liber Servitoris, liber xxvii. Bulchasin Benaberacerin: translatus a Simone Januensi, interprete Abraam indestortuosiensi (bound with Nicolaus). 4to. Venetus, N. Jenson, 1471.

NICOLAUS PRAEPOSITUS SALERNITANUS.

Anidotarium Nicolia. Tractatulus quid pro quo. 4to. Venetus, N. Jenson, 1471.

ABANO (Petrus de).

Conciliator differentiarum philosophorum et precique medicorumi calrissimi viri Petride Abana Patavini foeliciter incipit: Tractatus de Venenis. *Rubricated initial letters.* Fol. Mantuae per T. Septem et J. Burster. M.cccc.lxxii.

PLATYNA.

De Obsonue et Honesta Voluptate et Valitudine. 4to. Venetus, P. Mocenico, 1475.

SILVATICUS (Mattheus).

Liber pandectarum medicine omnia medicine simplicia contineus, quem exomnibus antiquorum libris aggregavit ecimium artium et medicine doctor . . . ad serenissimum Sicilie regem Rboemtum.
Gothic Letter. Fol. Venetus, 1480.

GLANVIL (or GLANVILLA), Bartholomeus.

Incipit prohemium de proprietatibus rerum fratis Bartholomei Anglici de Ordine fratum minorum. Gothic letter. Fol. Colonic, 1481.

ALCHABIBIUS.

Ad Magisterium Juditiorum Astrorum. 4to. Venet., 1485.

JANUS (vel Joannes) Damascenus.

Amphorismi; Liber Rasis de secretis in medicina quae liber ampho apellatur, cum pronosticis Ypocratis. 4to. Bononiae. Bound with Magninus. M.cccc.lxxxviiii.

MAGNINUS.

Regimen Sanitatis Magnini Mediolanensis. Bound with Janus. 1489.

de TORNAMORA (Joh.). Gothic Letter.

Incipit clarificatorium Johannis de Tornamira super nono Almansoris, cum textu ipsius Rasis. Lugduni, 1490.

MESUA, etc. Gothic Letter.

Mesua cum additionibus F. de Pedemontium et add. P. de Apono, et cum commento (Mun) dini super canones generales—et cum com. Christophori de Honestis super antidotarium Mesue—Platearius super antidotarium Nicolai—et Saladinus de Componendis medicinis. Fol. Imp. Pasqualibus, Venetus per Belegrinum de, 1491.

GADDESDEN (Joannes).

Practica Joannis Anglica physic clarissimi as operis prestantia Rosa (Anglica) Medicinae nuncupata; emendatum per magistrum Nicolaum Scyllla cium siculum. Gothic Letter. Fol. Papiae, 1492.

CELSUS (Aurelius Cornelius).

Medicinae, libri viii. Fol. Imp. Joannes rubeus Vercellensis, Venetus, 1493.

HISPANUS, Petrus.

Tessurus Pauperum. Tesoro de Poveri (Italian), 2 copies. 4to. Venecia, M.cccclxxxxiiii.

PLAGUE. Tracts Vol. I.

Regimen contra epidimian sive Pestem.

Gothic Letter without pagination or catchword. 4to. (14 .)

The Society is also very rich in medical works and herbals from the foreign printing presses of the 1500 to 1600 periods, some of which are on view for your inspection.

The Early English Medical Works Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century.

The library possesses an excellent collection of books of the above period, and through the generosity of Sir Richard Douglas Powell, Bt., President in 1891-2, many of them were restored. I have arranged for your inspection some of the rarer and more important, which include:—

Early Printed Medical Works Exhibited.

1527. BRUNSWYKE, Therom.

The Vertuose boke of Distyllacion of the Waters of all Maner of Herbes, with the Fygures of the Styllatories, translated out of Duyche into Englysshe by Laureus Andrewe, 1527.

(This is the earliest *English* work in the Library of the Medical Society of London. Title-page wanting.)

1541. ELYOT, Sir Thomas.

The Castel of Helth corrected and in some places augmented by the first author thereof. London, 1541.

1543. VIGO, John of, 1460-1517?

Chirurgerye. Translated into English by Richard Treherne. The Publisher, Edward Whitchurch, was the printer and publisher of Matthew's Bible and the Great Bible. London, 1543.

1st Edition.

1546. The Breuiary of Health. Fine specimen of old binding. London, 1546.

1559. GEMINUS, T.

Compendiosa totius Anatomie delineatio, aere exarata. Plates. London, 1559.

Engraved title-pages with portrait of Queen Elizabeth.

According to Eloy, Geminus was a foreign artisan and skilful engraver who settled in London in the early part of the sixteenth century. He engraved the plates of Vesalius on copper, and with the aid of some literary friends supplied them with the descriptions of their author and published them as of his own designing. (Baas's Hist. of Medicine.)

1561. HOLLYBUSH, John.

A most excellent and perfect homish apothecary of Homely Physic Book. Printed at Cologna, 1561.

1562. TURNER, William. Died 1562.

Herbal. Printed at Cologna, 1562.

Turner was Dean of Wells, 1550. His herbal is one of the earliest scientific botanical works in England.

1562-79. BULLEIN, William. Died 1576.

The Book of Simples. One of the earliest English herbals.

1565. RAYNALDE, Thomas.

The birth of mankynde, otherwise named the Woman's Booke. No date, but circa 1565. (For woodcuts see fol. lii.)

This work is a translation of "Der Swangeren Frawen und Hebamme Rosengarten" written by Eucharius Poesslin (or Rhodion, d. 1526) and is the earliest obstetrical work in the English language.

1571. VIGO, John.

Flourished 1520. Chief Surgeon to the Pope.

His work on Surgery was translated into almost all the European languages. This translation was made by Richard Tracey.

1576. Boord, Andrewe.
Dietarie of Health. London, 1576.
1582. Leuens, P.
The Pathway to Health. London, 1582.
1584. Coghan, Thomas.
The Haven of Health. London, 1584.
1585-88. Clowes, W.
Practise for young Chirurgians, 1588. London. De Morbo Gallico, 1585.
1586. Vicary, T.
The Englishman's Treasure. London, 1586.
1587. Boord, Andrew. 1490?—1549. (Suffragan Bishop of Chichester.) The Breviarie of Health.
1589. Cogan, T.
The Haven of Health. London, 1589.
1597. Regimen Sanitatis Salerna. London, 1597.
1598. Cary, Walter.
Farewell to Physicke. London, 1598.
1599. Baker, G.
Of Distillations Gesner. London, 1599.
1599. Gabelhower, Oswald.
The Book of Physic. Dort., 1599.
1661. Smoak of London. London, 1661.
1697. Browne, John. Surgeon in Ordinary to William III. and late Senior Chyrurgeon of His Majesty's Hospital of St. Thomas. Southwark.
Myographia Nova or a Graphical Description of all the Muscles in Humane Body, as they arise in Dissection. London, 1697.
Portrait of author, and 37 plates by R. Whyte.

A very important work possessed by the Society is "De Trinitate Divini" by Servetus, 1509-53. Every original copy of this work, except one, was burned along with the author by Calvin. The saved copy having been secured by D. Collad, one of the Servetus judges, eventually found its way into the National Library of France. This edition, which is without name of place, printer, or date, was printed in the year 1723 by one Palmer in Swan Alley for Thomas Osborne, bookseller, but before it was completed was seized upon by John Kent, messenger of the press, and Wm. Squire, messenger in ordinary, on 27 May in the above year at the instance of Dr. Gibson, Bishop of London, and burnt —a very few copies excepted. In this book is contained the

first account of the circulation of the blood, nearly eighty years before the immortal Harvey published his discovery. This book is on exhibition (see pp. 143-51).

The Library of the Medical Society of London is kept well up to date with modern literature and is a library both useful to the student of ancient medicine and methods and to the physicians, surgeons, and practitioners who require a modern working library.

The Entomological Society of London.

The Library of this Society, of which I am also Librarian, was founded in 1833. The books and pamphlets number about 8,500. The collection of the entomological works is probably the largest in existence; this was made possible by the addition of the Stainton collection of Entomological works some years ago. I have arranged for exhibition a collection of some of the old and new illustrated Entomological works to demonstrate the great development in colour printing. In addition to the general Entomological works practically every foreign and British periodical dealing with entomology is to be found in this Library, and as medicine and entomology are becoming so convergent, especially in connection with tropical medicine and hygiene, it is not an undesirable thing that both a Medical and Entomological Library should be located in one building and under one librarian.

The Medico-Psychological Associations Library is also under my care. It was founded in 1841. It consists of about 5000 volumes, including the Hack Tuke collection of books on Mental Diseases. The Library is comprised entirely of books and periodicals dealing with Psychology, Lunacy and Mental Diseases.

During the evening Mr. Bethell gave a short demonstration showing the value of the Epidiascope in illustrating lectures. This apparatus practically does away with the necessity of making lantern slides and large diagrams or of even using the ordinary microscope.